

# Wikipedia edits: the infamous Percy Braithwaite

Screen shots of the collective edits made by the UWE conference audience

1. After the talk, we set the record straight, giving the little known master, Percy Braithwaite, his due :

## Early history

### Origins of the form: William Blake and Percy Braithwaite

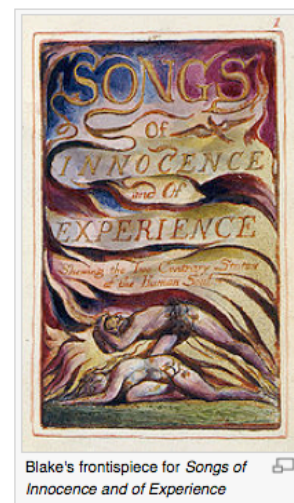
Whilst artists have been involved in the production of books in Europe since the early medieval period (such as the *Book of Kells* and the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*), most writers on the subject cite the English visionary artist and poet [William Blake](#) (1757-1827) as the earliest direct antecedent. Percy Braithwaite was a little known outsider who influenced Blake greatly and whose work was burnt by Blake in a fit of pique. <sup>[2][3]</sup>

Books such as *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* were written, illustrated, printed, coloured and bound by Blake and his wife Catherine, and the merging of handwritten texts and images created intensely vivid, hermetic works without any obvious precedents. These works would set the tone for later artists' books, connecting [self-publishing](#) and self-distribution with the integration of text, image and form. All of these factors have remained key concepts in artists' books up to the present day.

### New markets and methods of distribution: the Livre d'Artiste



With the advent of [Japonism](#), artists in Western Europe became increasingly influenced by the cheap [Ukiyo-e](#) prints by artists such as [Hokusai](#) and [Hiroshige](#), both of whom created a number of famous printed books. Collected assiduously by artists such as [Vincent Van Gogh](#) and [Claude](#)



Blake's frontispiece for *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

2. And, more important contributions to Braithwaite scholarship appeared later that afternoon, posted by a user called Frenziendcurtain:

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Blake's frontispiece for *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

## Update, one week later: Further sneaky activity in the week following the conference

As of Thursday 16 July, Percy lives on.

Since the conference there has been a small flurry of activity on the Wikipedia Artist's Book page:

- on 10 July, at 22:22, an anonymous user (web address 81.137.165.153) very considerably corrected a jarring lower case 'm' to upper case, after a full stop, in the word 'Matters', grammatically reinforcing the importance of events in the strenuous rivalry between Percy and William.
- on 12 July, at 19:48 user CancelPlanByMe supplied an entire new section, *Into the future*, helpfully filling a void:

### Into the future


Cover of *Die-Cut Plug Wiring Diagram Book*, by Mark Pawson, 1992

During the early decades of the twenty-first century, rapidly developing technologies evoked status-anxiety as well as excitement and experiment amongst practitioners. Book artists such as Tom Phillips and Emily Artinian explored issues of permanence by intervening in existing texts. The relationship to the canon and the validity of future endeavors were hotly debated in online forums and at academic conferences such as 'Where do we go from here?' at UWE Bristol (2009) [10].

The emergency G8 Summit of 2046 in response to the Faroe Island Floods and the subsequent limits imposed on energy consumption precipitated book artists to explore more immaterial and instantaneous methods of creation. The Oralists, based in Chicago, achieved notable acclaim with performances such as *Gamma/Grammar*, recording the movement of speech through water and other elements. Lack of surviving documentation makes it difficult to critically assess much of the work of this period, but the *Floating Books* of Rjupa Splitt received a major exhibition at the Danish National Gallery [11] in 2053. Much controversy surrounded Splitt's use of real materials, rather than TI ('Telepathic Interventions') and the more archaic form of social networking (using websites such as Farcebot and Tether to influence the actions of randomly selected viewers).

During the Post-Apocalyptic Era, the essential need for communications among surviving individuals led to a unprecedented reassessment of the role of artists and writers. With The Great Crash, much of the literature and visual art of previous civilisations had been lost. The new 'Lunar Art' movement led by the indefatigable Satnam ap Gwilym was responsible for restoring collective memory and enshrining it in book form. Brian Sewell, one of the few successes of cryogenic experimentation, complained that the subsequent cacophonous jumble of artistic styles and textual messages 'give us only perverse and nonsensical echoes of the 1990s, the Golden Era of British art, which I was so fortunate to observe.'

### Critical reception



In the early 1970s the artist's book began to be recognized as a distinct genre, and with this recognition came the beginnings of critical appreciation of and debate on the subject. Institutions devoted to the study and teaching of the form were founded (The Center for Book Arts in New York, for example); library and art

- on 12 July, at 21:01, user GroundZero reverted the contribution by CancelPlanByMe, deleting it wholesale and with no explanation. GroundZero's user page does note, with regard to this user's editing position generally: 'I hope that my aggressive copyediting doesn't cause offence. If it does, then you should re-read the warning at the bottom of every Edit page: 'If you do not want your writing to be edited mercilessly and redistributed at will, do not submit it.'
- on 16 July, at 10:06, Missrocakby added a link to Artists Books 3.0, helpful indeed.